

**CITY COUNCIL WORKSHOP
October 21, 2014
COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 PM**

COUNCILORS PRESENT

Councilor Bogan
Councilor Collins
Councilor Gates
Councilor Gray
Councilor Hamann
Councilor Keans*
Councilor Larochele
Councilor Lauterborn
Councilor Torr
Councilor Varney
Councilor Walker
Mayor Jean

OTHERS PRESENT

Deputy City Manager Blaine Cox
Commissioner Peter Nourse
Kristina Wentworth, Property Owner
Kenneth Weston, Architect

**Councilor Keans arrived at 7:08 PM*

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

Mayor Jean called the City Council Workshop meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Deputy City Clerk Marcia Roddy took a silent roll call. All members were present, with the exception of Councilor Lachapelle, who had been excused. *Councilor Keans arrived at 7:08 PM.*

2. Public Input

Mayor Jean invited members of the public to come forward to speak on relevant City matters.

Kristina Wentworth, business and property owner, said she has questions on why certain City Council minutes are not available for viewing at the Public Library and the Chamber of Commerce. She also commented on the fact that *Foster's Daily Democrat* did not have the evening's meeting posted.

Mayor Jean closed Public Input at 7:03 PM.

3. Communications from the City Manager

There were none.

4. Communications from the Mayor

4.1 Announcement: November 4, 2014, General Election

Mayor Jean announced that the State General Election will be held on Tuesday, November 4, 2014, and listed the polling places for each of the six (6) Wards.

4.2 Announcement: Regular City Council Meeting for November is scheduled for Wednesday, November 5, 2014.

Mayor Jean announced that due to the fact that the State General Election will be on Tuesday, November 4, 2014, the Regular City Council meeting will be held on the following evening of Wednesday, November 5, 2014 at 7:00 PM.

5. Presentation by Oak Point Associates: City Hall Annex

Commissioner Peter Nourse introduced Kenneth Weston, an architect with Oak Point Associates, who gave a PowerPoint presentation of the assessment performed by his firm regarding a potential renovation of the City Hall Annex for office use. He passed out hard copies of the assessment to the council members.

Following the presentation Mr. Weston took questions from the Council.

Councilor Walker asked what the space is between the Annex and City Hall. Mr. Weston said it is ten feet. Councilor Walker asked if there has been any thought as to attaching the two buildings. Mr. Weston said they hadn't looked at that possibility, but he believes the two buildings are not structurally compatible.

Mayor Jean updated the Council and residents as to what has been done so far with the Annex. In the past year the building was basically gutted and issues regarding mold and asbestos were addressed. This left the building more structurally sound and "buttoned" up for the time being. He said the Council is now in a position to review and discuss options for the building or consider new construction instead. He noted that in the FY 2015 there is money budgeted in the amount of Three Million Dollars. All of the cost estimates that have come in are higher than that: a renovation of the space is about \$3.8 million; a renovation plus an addition is \$4.5 million; new construction at the existing location would be \$3.9 million; and new construction with the addition is \$4.5 million. In addition, City Hall renovations are estimated at \$522,000.

Councilor Keans asked Mr. Weston a question regarding the elevator and what is going to happen with it. Mr. Weston said they are proposing a new elevator in the Annex. The connecting structure between the buildings would be removed as it is structurally unsound. The elevator in the City Hall would remain.

Councilor Gray commented on the location of the Council Chambers. He said that during evenings when the Opera House is being used for any activity the noise

level is disturbing to the meetings occurring in Chambers. He suggested better utilization of space in the City Hall and the Annex with no addition added. He had concerns about the maintenance of the buildings over time.

Councilor Keans asked for a description of a "conference room" versus a "collaboration room." Mr. Weston said that informal gathering spaces are available rather than using a conference room that needs to be "signed out" and anyone using the room for a brief meeting would have to leave when the conference room is needed. The informal rooms are simply a smaller space with a few chairs and/or table.

Councilor Keans asked Mr. Weston what kind of treatment will be given to the large window on the second floor of the Annex. Mr. Weston said they would hope to have a new window constructed with modern materials but with a look of the original window. Councilor Keans asked for a description of windows on the first floor. Mr. Weston said they would be fixed windows with a similar appearance of the old firehouse apparatus doors.

Councilor Varney asked Deputy City Manager Cox a question regarding debt service as discussed during the budget talks. He said that the estimates being proposed are considerably more than planned at budget time and do not include interest on loans. Councilor Varney also questioned the expense proposed for the City Hall renovation and Mr. Weston described what that would entail.

Councilor Varney said that originally there was no intention of doing any renovations to City Hall, but to only remodel the Annex for additional office space. He did not think relocated departments was in the plan. He asked Mayor Jean if this proposal was going to go to Public Works for further discussion. Mayor Jean said probably not, that it would be best kept at the Council level.

Councilor Varney said he did not think locating the City attorney in a separate building was a good idea since the attorney would be interacting with the City Manager on a regular basis and should be more accessible.

Councilor Collins asked how many people would be moved from the Community Center and how much space would be vacated there. Mr. Weston said there would be staff of the Economic Development Department, as well as a significant amount of storage from Human Resources and Economic Development.

Councilor Collins wanted to know if there are some offices currently located in City Hall that would be better served by being located at the Community Center. Mr. Weston said that his firm did not analyze the Community Center for potential uses. The three departments that they determined to benefit the most from co-locating were Economic Development, Planning, and Building, Zoning, and Licensing Services.

Councilor Collins said that there are members of the City Council with a variety of backgrounds that could give a great deal of input into the proposal for the City Hall

Annex and City Hall renovations. He said he would like to hear more from the councilors to utilize their experience and expertise in discussing the proposal.

Councilor Walker commented on the estimate for renovating the City Hall Annex and the cost for new construction. His opinion is that if the costs are nearly the same then new construction would be his preference.

Councilor Keans pointed out that this is a historic district, with the City Hall being the center of it. She said that the Council would be sending the wrong message to the community if it decided to destroy a historic building rather than restoring it.

Councilor Torr said he would not consider either of the proposals. He would rather find a new location and build a new three-story building. He said that a lot of money would be spent on maintaining an old building. Councilor Torr added that the Council Chambers is a bad design with the councilors sitting at a level above their constituents. He reiterated that he does not support renovating old buildings such as the Annex and the Community Center.

Councilor Hamann agreed with Councilor Torr. He said that he lives in a 110 year old house and is constantly spending money on repairs and upkeep and at the end of the day he still has a 110 year old house. He agreed with Councilor Gray about the distraction of the noise from the Opera House. He agree also with Councilor Torr regarding the location of the councilors in the Chambers as they look down on the audience. He pointed out that the Annex building has been renovated several times and most of its historical appearance is gone and there is nothing left but a brick shell with no real historical look to it.

Councilor Bogan asked if this is the only plan that has been looked at, or has the Council looked at other property. Mayor Jean said that this is the only idea that has been explored in recent years and no other properties have been looked at. The proximity of the Annex has always seemed to be the most logical site for expansion.

Councilor Gates said that in all of his years in home construction and repair work he noted that most older homes needed constant work and repair.

Councilor Torr said that some time ago a plan was proposed to add an addition to the old police/fire station as a means of expansion, but nothing came of that. If there are some people who wish to keep the Annex building for historical purposes, let them. He said again that new construction makes more sense to him. He said that there are locations for building that are still in the downtown area, such as the vacant Ben Franklin building and the vacant *Foster's [Daily Democrat]* buildings.

Councilor Varney asked Mr. Weston if he had looked at the design proposed 4 or 5 years ago. Mr. Weston said yes, but they were advised that it was an "exotic" floor plan and that the City was looking for something simpler.

Councilor Varney said he spoke with the City Manager about looking at available space at the Community Center. He said there is a lot of unused space there that could be looked at.

Councilor Larochelle asked if the renovation work at the Annex would bring the building up to modern standards with regard to heating, ventilation, etc.. These are things that also need to be considered.

Councilor Gates asked if the Tax Office next to City Hall has ever been looked at for usable space. Mayor Jean said there is no acceptable egress from the basement that would be up to code.

Councilor Walker asked Councilor Varney if he was suggesting moving the Planning Department and Building, Zoning, and Licensing Services to the Community Center rather than moving Economic Development to the City Hall Annex. Councilor Varney said he was suggesting looking at the space available there and whether or not it is usable.

Mayor Jean said he sees the new plan as much more reasonable than any proposals in the past. He said there is a lot more to look at now and ideas that have been brought up are worth considering. He suggested keeping this topic on the agenda for both the November Regular Council meeting and the Workshop.

Councilor Varney said looking at the space at the Community Center, in particular the cafeteria, is worth doing. Mayor Jean said he is not impressed with that building and feels that it has an "institutional" feel about it. It was not a good building when it was built and probably should never have been built as a school.

Councilor Torr asked if there is any Federal money available for these building projects. Mayor Jean said he is not aware of any.

Councilor Gates said he thinks Councilor Varney's suggestion is a good one and should be taken seriously.

Councilor Torr said most of the recent City Managers had wanted all of the Department Heads under one roof, which is one of the reasons the Annex renovation has been proposed. He pointed out that the Council Chambers is a large space that just sits all week and is not used.

Councilor Walker asked if a new building was erected instead of renovating the existing buildings would be about the same. Mr. Weston said there would be added site costs, but essentially the costs are similar.

6. Department Reports

There was no discussion.

7. Adjournment

Councilor Walker **MOVED** to adjourn the Workshop meeting at 8:10 PM. Councilor Varney seconded the motion. The **MOTION CARRIED** by unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia H. Roddy

Deputy City Clerk